

# Art Plan

## Seattle's Community Centers 1999 Community Center Levy Program

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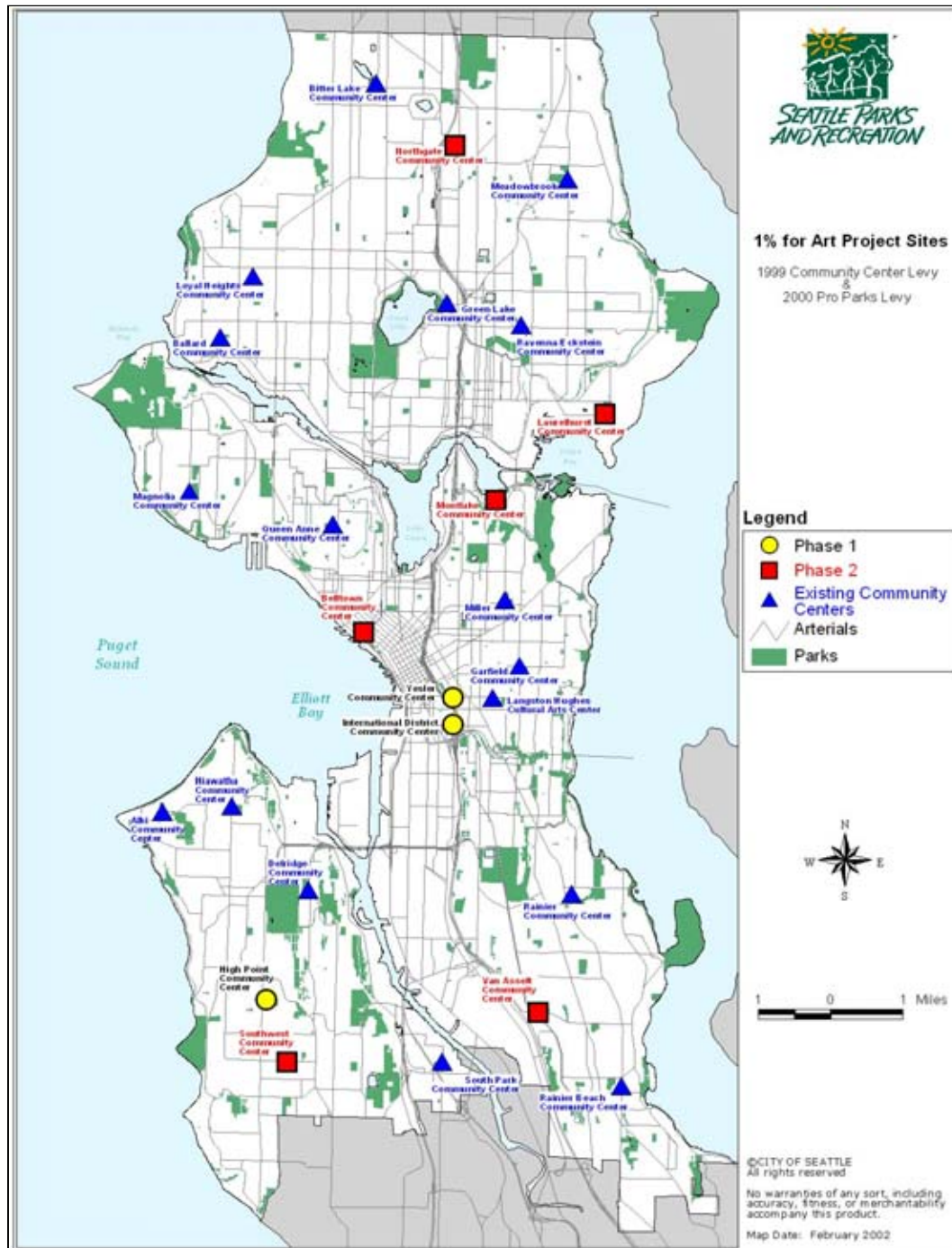
Seattle Arts Commission

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The Seattle community centers are part of a city-wide system. While they are of a neighborhood scale and identity, they also provide a means of introducing people from various parts of the city to one another and different community centers through their diverse programming. The centers build a multitude of connections in many wonderful ways.



## OVERVIEW

The Community Centers Art Plan describes a method to link Seattle's community centers and create a sense of shared identity through art. Exterior artworks, sited in the centers' entry zones, will engage all visitors as they come and go, and amplify the community centers' street presence even to passersby. Artworks will provide a memorable experience for users of all ages whether they visit once or many times over the years.

## INTRODUCTION

Seattle's community center system is an established network of buildings scattered throughout the city delivering a wide array of services to Seattle's citizens. These centers are more than just buildings. Each is a vibrant, effective place for people of all generations to gather, exercise, learn, and share regardless of the age or size of its facility. These facilities work tirelessly, year-round, for the entire community.

Seattle's citizens have always appreciated their community centers. Their support has led to the passage of a number of levies over the years to strengthen and improve them. The current levy, passed in 1999, will address a number of physical deficiencies that hinder full programming in many of the older community centers, and establish new



The artworks above and below engage the entry zones of each building in different ways. While the piece above pushes the idea of gateway into a more creative form, it remains more of a static marker that frames this community center's entrance. The boat form has a nice, lively presence at night when it is transformed through the use of internal lighting and appears to float above the ground.

The grouping of sculptural key forms below animatedly marks the entrance to the high school, while also making a conceptual and physical reference to the school's namesake, Ben Franklin. These sculptures suggest many options and choices to people as they come and go. They are also quasi-functional as seating and might suggest physical interaction to younger people. This artwork is closer to the vision of this art plan.



community centers in some areas of the city that have gone without.

This Art Plan outlines a conceptual approach that acknowledges the individuality of each center while recognizing that each is part of a citywide system. The plan includes seven of the nine community centers included in the 1999 Community Center Program Levy, as well as two additional centers, Montlake and Laurelhurst, funded by the 2000 Pro Parks Levy. The inclusion of Montlake and Laurelhurst in the Art Plan strengthens its conceptual approach and will facilitate implementation of artworks in these centers. Two other community centers will include a variation to the general artwork concept. Belltown and International District community centers will be housed in private developments, and, thus, will have a very different physical presence than the rest. In these two centers, the scale and location of the art projects will differ in order to work within the limits of the architectural spaces and street presence. In each of these cases, artwork will be created as a welcoming presence in the lobby interior.

## BACKGROUND

Each community center works primarily on a neighborhood scale, with programming set by a community-based advisory body. While neighborhoods are rightfully proprietary about their centers, each center has programs that draw people from diverse locations throughout the city. Programs such as youth sports programs, and specialized classes and facilities like swimming pools. In many ways, the centers are agents in “mixing it up,” building connections between neighborhoods and causing many citizens to be more aware of the whole city.

In addition to the centers’ many actual users, many other Seattleites relate to the centers while driving or walking by. It is important even for non-users to be able to identify these public amenities and see them as a vibrant part of our civic portrait.

Currently, the centers are not linked together visibly as a network, other than by the Parks Department “rainbow” sign and the general sequence of interior spaces. Typically the design of each community center is architecturally distinct. This will continue to be the case with these current renovations and new designs. This Art Plan offers a way to link the centers visually, while also honoring the distinctive character of each center and its neighboring community. The plan also focuses creative attention on the exterior entry areas, which are not a high priority element on the list of complex programmatic needs developed for the community center architects.

## THE ROLE OF ART IN SEATTLE’S COMMUNITY CENTERS

The Seattle Arts Commission has created a legacy of public art in Seattle’s community centers that is as diverse as the centers that contain it. Artwork exists in many different exterior and interior locations. Some art projects have become part of the persona of the center, while others have a much lower profile and little impact. In some cases, the art might not even be noticed, except by the most regular users of the center. At other community centers, such as South Park, Miller, and Ravenna Eckstein, the art projects were sited in visible outside locations and acted, incidentally, as entry markers.



While these two gateway pieces above and below announce their community centers very well, acting as a type of beacon, they do not engage people in the active manner desired through this art plan. In order to do this, the artwork will need to be a significant part of the area through which people move.

At South Park Community Center (above) the arch with images and words can be read from the street but presents its back to those leaving the center. We want to engage people coming and going.

The gateway at Miller Community Center (below) is very visible from the street, but not from the parking lot entrance. The wind vane and decorative cornice above the door enliven the building but are outside people’s physical experience as they move through the entrance zone.





Seattle's community centers usually treat the exterior entry zone in a fairly perfunctory way. However, because the "action" of the community center begins upon crossing the threshold, the entrance area is of great importance in greeting and saying farewell to users and in establishing a street or neighborhood presence. The entrance can "advertise" the vitality of a center and underscore its individuality. This area is open-ended, waiting to be mined, so to speak.

The Community Center Art Plan recommends that the entrance area of every community center become the focus for siting public artworks. Most people enter and leave community centers with positive prospects. They are out and about, participating in an activity they have chosen. They are interacting in a caring, interesting environment. They plan to accomplish something. All this human energy can merge in a wonderful way with some great art energy to underscore that *transitional moment*. For the many people who travel to different community centers, it will be great fun to compare the different entry experiences. And those who drive or walk by will be more likely to take note of the community centers because of the visual "beacons."

## CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

The concept for art at the community centers is to employ artists to create an "entry experience" at each community center. Each artwork will serve as a three dimensional "welcome mat / experience." This interactive, surrounding experience will begin in the zone outside the center's main entry. It could begin at the curb or walkway from the parking area, certainly within the larger area outside the entry door as described by the architecture and landscape design, and will continue to the threshold of the center. Each community center will have its particular "art zone" delineated for the project.

In conceptualizing their artwork, artists should first consider what a community center is and then the nature of their specific community center. In addition, artists

should consider the particular characteristics of the location within the city and the architecture and landscape of the community center site. At the same time, artists should be aware that, while working at an individual center, their work would be part of a network of entry artworks that will create a sense of connection among community centers citywide.

This approach allows for:

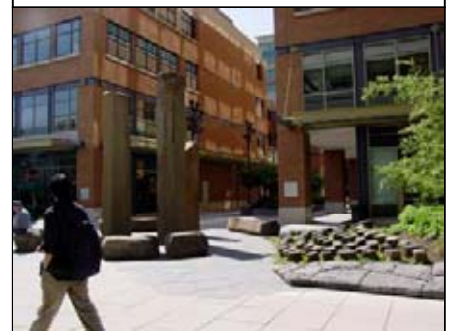
- flexibility in developing the art project schedules, as artists need not be tied tightly to the project design schedules;
- involving artists at various stages of the design process and working with diverse community center schedules during the life of the levy;
- applying construction dollars to art projects when possible (Arts Commission and Parks Department project managers will work together to identify and facilitate these opportunities); and
- using One Percent for Art funding directly to develop significant artworks, instead of spending a considerable portion for artists' time on design teams.



The artwork at the entrance to Meridian Parks embraces people by literally putting them entirely inside the artwork as they enter and exit. The piece also lets visitors interact with it through an enticing use of materials that beg exploration, a form that invites climbing, and placing a hidden seat within the structure.

Below, the two areas in the Vulcan Plaza combine an engaging and dramatic use of materials and landscaping to create unique zones that invite and draw one in. Many of the sculptural elements double as seating and also allow people of different ages to physically interact with them in other imaginative ways. Only the area in the top photo has a vertical presence that announces itself from a distance.

These two examples are very close to exemplifying the vision and goals for the artwork laid out in this art plan.



## VISION

The artworks under this Art Plan will:

- conceptually connect the individual community center to a greater whole of the community center system within the Parks Department by activating the same area at each center;
- allow for individuality of artwork that reflects a particular center and its neighborhood;
- be visible from the street and as people approach, increasing the presence of the centers within the neighborhood and the city; and
- act as identifiers for their community center.

## GOALS

Each artwork:

- expresses an idea about or interprets what a community center is (gathering, community, learning, experiencing, athletics, all ages, neighborhood, city, etc);
- acts as a beacon and/or icon within the neighborhood and city;
- creates an interactive, three dimensional experience that engages people on a number of levels coming and going;
- makes a tangible connection to people, possibly on a multi-sensory level;
- communicates its intended concept(s) well;
- creates an active outside zone linking it to the active inside of the center;
- works functionally and aesthetically with the landscape and architectural design and other important site issues;
- works in three dimensions, within the entire envelope of the zone's space; and
- adds spice and life to the center's entry.



## PROJECT SCHEDULE

Although there are slightly different start-up times for the construction projects, the Arts Commission will organize the sites into two or three groups to facilitate efficient project management and streamline artist selection. An additional benefit to this approach is that the artists in each group can share their concepts as they develop them and communicate with each other in other ways to enhance an understanding of their projects.

The community center projects are listed below, in order of their design and construction schedules, with possible groups indicated based on current knowledge:

<b>Group One:</b>	<b>Group Two:</b>
<b>2002-2004</b>	<b>2004-2006</b>
High Point	Van Asselt
Yesler	Montlake
Southwest	Laurelhurst
International District	Northgate
	Belltown

## ARTIST SELECTION METHODS AND SCHEDULE

The Seattle Arts Commission will use a selection method to generate a strong pool of candidates and attract the most interested, capable artists. Because the community centers serve culturally diverse communities and the art budgets are relatively small, these projects are ideal for artists who are ready to



Artwork at the King County Jail entrance (above), effectively transforms the entry zone in all dimensions through a combination of ground plane patterning, a series of engaging sculptural forms placed throughout the area, landscaping and an image on the building wall near the door. Vibrant colors combined with form and image distinguishes this zone. The piece is highly visible from many vantage points and definitely defines the building and people's experience of its drab, institutional presence.

The Federal Building (below) features an artwork in the entry area that is much more subtle than the other examples sited in this plan, but is engaging for other reasons. Each stone in the grouping is unique and carefully placed in relationship to the others. Subtle changes have been sculpted into some of the stones that are visible upon closer examination. While the piece does not effectively engage the entire entry area the contrast of the purposeful use of the natural stone to the built area is very appealing and meaningful. The artworks for the community centers can use a wide variety of materials to achieve the goals of the art plan.



make a significant career move, either from studio work to public art commissions or to increase the scale and complexity of their current work. Therefore, the Arts Commission will solicit applications from a diverse group of emerging artists new to permanently-sited public art. It is recommended that the selection panel for a new Emerging Public Artists Roster include one artist who has worked on past community center projects.

For the first group of community centers, every attempt should be made to have the roster selection coincide as closely as possible with the architectural design schedule. The timing of artist selection will be affected by two factors. First, it is important to determine a schedule that allows artists proposals to be integrated into the architectural design and construction drawings, leveraging potential construction funds that can be used as part of the art budget. Second, it is also important to minimize the time elapsed between artwork conception and fabrication so that proposals do not have to languish for several years during design review and construction. A balance will have to be struck.

The Seattle Arts Commission recommends that the first group of artists be selected during the second half of 2002. Artists in the first group will be selected either from the current Seattle Arts Commission roster or, if timing allows, through a call to artists that will result in the new roster of approximately 20 to 25 artists from which to select. Because of the size of the project budgets, priority should be given to local or regional artists so we minimize travel expenses.

## PROJECT ARTIST SELECTION PROCESS

Once a pool of artists is identified, the Arts Commission will send a letter to artists in the roster/pool explaining this opportunity in detail and asking each artist to indicate their specific interest by addressing several questions.

It is very important to select artists who understand the vision of the Art Plan and meet the goals for the artwork. It is also important during the selection process to

assess the artist's ability to transition from their current work and create art for the entry zone.

After creation of a roster, the Arts Commission recommends that individual community center selection panels be comprised of representatives from the Parks Department (including the director of the community center under consideration) and representatives from the community. Appropriate advisors, including other representatives from the community center sites, the arts planner and if possible, the designer, should be present during the selection process to advise the panel. In managing the selection process, Arts Commission staff will follow these guidelines:

- Provide the selection panel with a detailed orientation to the community center art plan and the specific community center's character and site.
- Use material about past community center projects and other projects to clarify goals.
- Provide guidance to the parks department and community representatives during selection to ensure that the chosen artists can strongly and creatively meet the stated goals of the plan.
- Instruct panelists to seek out evidence of strong conceptual skills in selected artists, so that the artists can meet the intent of the plan, as well as solid and interesting artwork.



There is a diverse use of art around Garfield Community Center. Although effective, none of the art achieves what we seek through this art plan. The "Tree" (top) is certainly a highly visible piece that marks the center from the vantage point of the busy roads that run along the sides of the center.

However, it is not located where it transforms an area through which people move.

The entrance area off the parking lot (middle), effectively the main entry, has no artwork. Under this plan, we would like to focus on the most highly used entry area of each center and create an interactive, three-dimensional experience that engages people on a number of levels as they come and go.

If the most used entry is less visible from the street, the artist will have to determine creative ways to establish some artistic presence that acts as a beacon or recognizable icon for the building.

Artwork is integrated into the exterior of the building at the front, or formal, entrance of this center (bottom). Word phrases are cast into the stairs and a decorative screen-like piece sits over the doorway. While these artworks function as aesthetic elements that clearly enhance the building, they don't actively engage people in the way described by this plan.

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT

To ensure the successful implementation of the Art Plan's conceptual approach, project managers for both the Seattle Arts Commission and the Parks Department must be excellent, comprehensive guides to the artists, the community and the designers. It is important to keep in mind that the community center projects in total, will be unfolding over a long period of time. Keeping the Art Plan's vision alive throughout this extended period of time is challenging, but very possible if everyone stays committed. When and if it becomes necessary to pass the baton, it is extremely important that this be done conscientiously.

With the number of projects included in this plan, we know that artists will be coming from different levels of experience and background. While that diversity of background and artistic perspective is desirable, we want artists to be sensitive to the parameters of the project and site and to do their best work in response to them

To lay the groundwork that will lead to the success of the projects, the Art Plan calls for Arts Commission and Parks Department project managers to meet with the art planner to clarify expectations and develop a means to collaborate over the life of the levy. This initial discussion will address several areas of concern for the group as a whole, including:

- Articulating the Art Plan's goals and expectations clearly to each artist and design consultant.
- Working with Parks Department personnel and current community center staffs to assemble the best comprehensive description of what community centers are and how they work in Seattle to give to the artists. This will ground them in the citywide concept of the centers.

- Facilitating observation time for artists at their center and others in the system, to give them the grounding as well as conceptual fuel to fire their imaginings of how their art might impact users in the community center's entry zone.
- Interacting with artists consistently throughout the conceptual process, pointing out strengths and weaknesses at various stages well in advance of their proposal presentation.
- Helping artists take advantage of any mentoring the Arts Commission can provide in the areas of fabrication and material technology and fundamentals of working in the public art field.

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Create a Standard Method for Art Display inside Community Centers*

Arts Commission and community center staffs share an interest in displaying artwork in a protected environment at community centers. Displayed artwork could include works from the Commission's Portable Works Collection as well as artwork created on site by adults and children taking art classes. This is a valuable way to infuse the centers' lobby areas with art and at the same time promote a center's art program.

With the participation of the Commission's Portable Art Collection manager, the planner developed language



These two community centers, Montlake (above) and Southwest (below), are among those scheduled for renovation that will add activity space or a gym. Unlike the completely new centers, designs for renovations and additions may not result in changes to the existing building entrance. The challenge for the artists working on the renovations will be to carefully examine the existing entrance zone for ways to retrofit it with artwork that accomplishes the goals of the art plan.

The architecture of each center is unique, highlighting the individual identity of each center within its particular neighborhood. In some cases a center's architectural design is an example of a style of architecture from a different era and has a very different neighborhood presence than more contemporary community center designs. This situation will add another type of challenge for an artist working with a renovation or addition project.

While the artwork for each center will be as unique as the building's design, the fact that the artwork will be located in the same area of all the centers included in the current levy establishes a system-wide link.





to describe appropriate display cases. The Parks Department agreed to include this language in their set of standards for the Design Program Guidelines for community centers.

In turn, the Arts Commission will create a programmatic concept for a changing display, possibly thematic, and explore the potential for featured artists to come and talk while their work is displayed.

### *Encourage Design Consultants to Integrate Artwork into the Buildings*

Although artists will not be integrating art throughout community center buildings under this Art Plan, the Seattle Arts Commission strongly encourages the Parks Department and their design consultants to look for creative ways to use artists and artisans on other aspects of their projects. One easy and well-tested method is to commission artists to create building and design components, using funds from the construction budget. These artist-made building elements would replace off-the-shelf items or architect-designed components. With this simple step, the overall spirit and aesthetics of a project is greatly enhanced without increasing costs; money simply goes to an artist rather than a manufacturer. In buildings throughout the region, we have evocative examples of artist-made tile work, railings, light fixtures, furniture, floor treatments, and more.

Experienced artists can be readily identified through pre-qualified artist rosters maintained by the Seattle Arts Commission and King County Public Art Commission. The process of commissioning artists from these rosters is similar to pulling designers or consultants from the many types of rosters established by the City of Seattle for various types of projects.

## COMMUNITY CENTER BUDGETS

By pooling the community center One Percent for Art funds, we can work with the community centers as a system rather than as individual units. Pooling funds also affords the best opportunity to realize art projects that would have the greatest impact

throughout the current set of projects. In addition, the Commission and the Parks Department can address some equity issues by looking historically and geographically at needs assessment and the specific scope of each project. For instance, some community center projects are at park sites that will be receiving a great deal of funding through the Pro Parks Levy or are being developed in conjunction with other city facilities like a library and neighborhood service center. This was all considered in determining the following budget allocations.

## COMMUNITY CENTER BUDGETS

### First Phase Projects

Highpoint	\$50,629
Yesler	\$50,629
Southwest	\$50,629
International District*	\$18,411
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$170,298</b>

### Second phase Projects

Northgate	\$36,054
Van Asselt	\$50,629
Montlake	\$36,054
Laurelhurst	\$36,054
Belltown*	\$18,411
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$177,202</b>

**Total** **\$347,500**

*\*Smaller floor or wall projects in entries.*



High Point Community Center (above) is one of the centers slated for renovation where the addition will affect the entry area. When the newly renovated building opens, people using the parking lot will come around to the front of the building and enter the center through a new doorway that faces toward the street. The new entrance area, as well as the enlarged building, will have a more substantial presence from the street.

Each of the community centers for which there is an opportunity to create artwork offers different physical site challenges to the selected artist. There will be many different ways to envision and create artworks that express an idea about what a community center is, act as beacons, and establish active outside zones that links to the active inside zones of the center – to highlight some of this art plan's goals.

Delridge Community Center (below) has an art project created during the last community center levy. The artists for this project focused their efforts primarily on the interior of the building, which is already a very active area. An exterior artwork was located some distance from the entry. This art plan takes the opportunity to strongly express the vitality of the center to everyone passing by and using the center.



## ART PLAN PROCESS

In developing the conceptual approach for Art Plan, arts planner Carolyn Law analyzed public art in Seattle's community centers. She visited all of the community centers with public art projects to assess what the artwork contributes, how the projects stood the test of time, etc. During some visits, she spoke with on-site staff about the impact of the artwork, and also sought follow-up conversations with others to further expand her sense of how art worked within the community center environments. She also conducted conversations with Arts Commission and Parks Department staff who had been involved in past community center art projects, to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches and projects from the Parks Department perspective.

The arts planner also visited all community centers slated for renovation work under the levy. At these centers, she spoke with staff, including directors when available, about their thoughts about the impacts of the renovation on their buildings and programs. For those sites that will gain a new center, she consulted Seattle Parks Superintendent, and administrative, development and project management staff for broader background information. Finally, she consulted with people from the Parks Department's North, South and Central Divisions, to gather more information about the centers.

The Art Plan was reviewed by the Seattle Arts Commission Public Art Advisory Committee and the Seattle Board of Parks Commissioners. It also underwent progressive internal review by Erin DeVoto, head of the Planning and Development Division of the Parks Department, and Barbara Goldstein, Program Director for Public and Community Arts at Seattle Arts Commission.

Artwork credits. Photos: Carolyn Law. All artwork located in Seattle, Washington, except as noted. Page 2: top, Clark Weigman, *Spirit Boat*, 1998, West Hill Community Center, Skyway, WA; bottom, Clark Weigman *Key Grove*, 1999, Franklin High School. Page 4: top two photos, Ginny Ruffner, detail: *The Unified Playing Field Theory/Gateway*, 1989, South Park Community Center; bottom, Kate Wade and Lydia Aldrich, detail: *Gateway Lantern, Skyline Canopies, House Finial*, 1998, Miller Community Center. Page 6: top, Chuck Greening, *Meridian Gateway/Meridian Park Entrance*, 1985; middle, John Hoge with Murase Associates Landscape Architects, *Cascadia: Sentries of the Palisades*, 2000, Union Station Plaza; bottom, John Hoge with Murase Associates Landscape Architects, *Cascadia: Garden of Vessels*, 2000, Union Station Plaza. Page 8: top two photos, Martha Schwartz, *Jail House Garden*, 1987, King County Jail; bottom, Isamu Noguchi, *Landscape of Time*, 1975, 2nd Avenue Plaza, Henry Jackson Federal Office Building. Page 10: top, Stuart Keeler with Coyote Junior High, *Tree Sculpture Project*, 2001, Garfield Community Center; bottom, Mark Calderon and Beliz Brother, *Stair Risers (Quotations) and Grille*, Garfield Community Center.